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Review of Hard Labour?: Academic Work and the Changing Landscape of Higher Education

Tom Duff

*Dublin Institute of Technology*Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/level3>

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Book review for LEVEL3 2012

Title: **Hard labour?: academic work and the changing landscape of higher education**

Authors: Tanya Fitzgerald, Julie White and Helen Gunther

Publisher: Emerald

Year: 2012

ISBN: 9781780525006

Key words: HE policy-making, neo-liberalism, managerialism, audit regimes, gender

The book addresses issues in education policymaking with specific reference to university faculties of education in Australia and England. It has six chapters by three authors two of whom are based in Australia while the third is based in England; they are senior academics with significant publication records. Each has nominated themes through which they examine policy changes, tensions and uncertainties in the sector.

The authors address the impact on academics of policy issues in HE such as neo-liberal principles, the changed nature of the relationship between the state, the market and universities and the application of private business values – accountability, governance, internationalisation, targets, standards, compliance, audit regimes, evaluations, performativity, quality assurance and ranking tables. These combined raise the authors' concerns in relation the loss of academic independence and the competing demands of managerial control and intellectual autonomy. The 1997 New Labour government is identified as a catalyst for the changes and the top-down modernisation agenda.

The first chapter identifies issues that are addressed in succeeding chapters: knowledge production, scholarly identity, the nature of academic work and professional practice, the relationship between the university and the teaching profession, the role of women and their under-representation in academic leadership positions; and, the re-shaping of academic work in a globalised world. The final chapter proposes typologies for the future. Research findings quoted show that some 50% of Australian academics have been identified as being at risk of psychological concerns. It is claimed that women particularly are under severe pressures because of their gender.



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The authors write about their experiences of changes over this past 30 years, their impact on faculties of education and the fact that government funding is being reduced or withdrawn in humanities and arts degrees. I found that some of the issues raised were somewhat repetitive perhaps due to the individual nature of the chapters/authors. They make reference to the so-called ‘privileges’ and ivory tower once enjoyed by academic staff in these areas. Clearly, however, there is now a changed environment where value for taxpayers’ money and accountability has come to the fore; this reality doesn’t appear to be acknowledged by the authors. Also, I found little reference to the needs of students generally in terms of their expectations in the modern-day academy.

Interestingly, a former college president in Ireland has recently stated that university lecturers effectively teach for 24 weeks per year with a maximum of 16 hours per week. (Mooney, P. (2012) Irish Times, 20 March 2012); not dissimilar to Australia and England.

Reviewer: Dr Thomas Duff, formerly Registrar at the Dublin Institute of Technology and a former lecturer and head of department, with over 30 years experience of HE policy making.